

THE ROLE OF INTELLECT (*AL-'AQL*) IN THE DISCOURSE OF HARUN NASUTION

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ABSTRACT

Harun Nasution is an important name in the reformation of religious thought in Indonesia. His ideal of reformation is modelled along the classical rational thought of Mu'tazilah. He had acquired the profound interest in the theology of the latter while writing his PhD thesis at McGill University, Canada. To him, the Mu'tazilah theology demonstrated the importance of human intellect, that is, Islam is a rational religion, a religion which runs in tandem with reason. The mindset of the society needs to free from dogmatic and legalistic traditions to enable it to realize its potentials and abilities to change from a traditional society to a contemporary society in tandem with the demands of modernization. Harun Nasution believed that Islam is not based on narrow and rigid doctrines but in its real essence has a broad and wide horizon and that it allows space for interpretation via allegorical and liberal manner.

Keywords: *Intellect, al-'Aql, Harun Nasution*

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INTRODUCTION

In adapting to the process of modernization and progress, Harun Nasution sought to institute religious reforms in education based on Mu'tazilah theological thought. His position in theology suggests the importance of reason as a way to reinterpret or to realize the doctrines of Islam that help to mould the Muslim society in tandem with the state's political ideology of *Pancasila*.² This essay will analyze critically the main issues pertaining to the role of intellect raised by Harun Nasution, which he deemed necessary to embark on changes in the minds of Muslims in Indonesia.

REASON AND REVELATION

A.J. Arberry was right when he considered the problem of the relationship between revelation and reason as indeed one of the famous and profound topics in the history of human thought.³ In discussing the history of the debate, let us begin with the Mu'tazilah. From the Greek philosophical works, the Mu'tazilah not only learned certain philosophical views but two methods of reasoning namely, the method of syllogism and a new use of the method of analogy.⁴ Thus, the Mu'tazilah had used philosophical reasonings in a manner to accord the mind (*al-'aql*) with certain a privileged position.

Abu al-Hudhayl, a Mu'tazilah thinker, defined the *haql* as both the means of knowing, and the knowledge thus acquired.⁵ He contended that reason addresses four fundamentals:⁶ *First*, through *'aql* man has the knowledge of God. *Second*, the *'aql* necessitates the necessary knowledge of the obligation of man to God. *Third*, the *'aql* has the necessary knowledge

² The five (*panca*) guiding principles (*sila*) of the Republic of Indonesia.

³ Arberry, A. J. (1975), *Revelation and reason in Islam*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., p. 7.

⁴ Both these philosophical methods of reasoning differed from the *kalām* method of analogy in that they both reasoned from philosophical data, whereas the *kalām* method of analogy reasoned from Islamic religious data. With regard to the philosophical use of analogy, it differed from *kalām* use of analogy in that it was based upon an equality of relations, whereas *kalām* use of analogy was based upon a mere likeness between things, see Wolfson, Harry Austryn (1976), *The Philosophy of Kalām*, Harvard: Harvard University Press, p. 30.

⁵ Al-Shahrastani (1967), *Kitab al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, Cairo: Mu'assasah al-Halabi, h. 52; Kazi, A. K. and Flynn, J. G. (trans.) (1984), *Kitab al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, London: Kegan Paul International, p. 48.

⁶ Abd al-Jabbār (1965), *Sharh al-Usūl al-Khamsah*, Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, pp. 565-570.

to distinguish between good and evil. *Fourth*, the *`aql* also has the necessary knowledge of the obligation for man to do goods and avoid evils.

`Abd al-Jabbar, a celebrated Mu'tazilah theologian in his time and considered as the head of Mu'tazilah school in his generation,⁷ gave the following definition for *al-`aql*:

*Let it be known that `aql refers to a collection of knowledge, which consists of particular knowledge. When a person is in the possession of it, then his inquiry, inference and undertaking shall be sound.*⁸

Harun Nasution, a strong advocator of Mu'tazilah theology, shared similar views with Abu al-Hudhayl, that through sheer intellect man is able to have four fundamentals of knowledge⁹ and that it is the intellect that makes man into a cultured and high moral creature of God.¹⁰ Thus, the concept of *al-`aql* by Mu'tazilah epistemology refers to things known and *`aql* is, therefore, a set of knowing or knowledge. To them, the *`aql* is the built-in system of knowing and assessment of the various situations.

Thus, the *`aql* relates to the rational intuition, giving knowledge to general truths. The kind of knowledge referred to by the Mu'tazilah is knowledge of general ethical truths which are drawn out from particular experiences, which are learnt by direct apprehensions.¹¹ A rational person knows what he perceives and he knows from his own situation and that another person seeing the same thing will similarly know it. By this account, a rational person will know something as good and at the same time will know something as bad or evil. He will know that the consequence of wrongdoing or the act of ingratitude to God will

⁷ Hourani, George F. (1971), *Islamic Rationalism: The Ethics of `Abd al-Jabbār*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 7.

⁸ Abd al-Jabbār (1962), *al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-Tawhīd wa al-'Adl*, Vol. 11, Cairo: Mu'assah al-Misriyyah al-Ummah li al-Ta'lif wa al-Anbā', p. 375.

⁹ Harun Nasution (1995), "Kaum Mu'tazilah dan Pandangan Rasionalnya," in *Islam Rasional: Gagasan dan Pemikiran*, Bandung: Penerbit Mizan, p. 132.

¹⁰ Harun Nasution (1995), "Filsafat Hidup Rasional, Prasyarat Bagi Mentalitas Pembangunan," in *Islam Rasional: Gagasan dan Pemikiran*, Bandung: Penerbit Mizan, p. 139.

¹¹ Hourani (1971), *op.cit.*, pp. 21-22.



eventually cause pain and hardship to him. Similarly, he will know the benefit of doing good deed and the obligation to return the pledge made with God. Simply by virtue of innate knowledge that exists in them necessitates accountability of their action and gratitude to God.

The sets of knowing as described by Harun Nasution and the Mu'tazilah, are akin to common sense that every individual human has. The *`aql* is assumed to know what is beneficial and what is harmful to human independently, that is, knowledge of this kind does not depend on revelation. The question that now arises is what is the role of revelation in the human life? If man by his very nature already has moral knowledge, then does this knowledge contradict the ethical values of revelation?

For Harun Nasution and the Mu'tazilah, revelation brought knowledge but different from that which the *`aql* has as there are no means for the *`aql* to know that something is good or evil except through prophethood. Revelation is for both information and confirmation. Still, it functions as supplementary what was otherwise known through reason. Prophecy contains detailed guidelines of the law of which prior to it the *`aql* on its own has a general knowledge of it. In this manner, revelation does not contradict reason.¹² Harun Nasution's argument of the relationship is based on the following Mu'tazilah's assertion:

*Revelation only unveils about the nature of acts of which the knowledge of its evil and good are known by reason. Similarly, we knew by reason that a prayer is of great benefit to us, we will be inclined to perform it and thereby earned the reward and that we would know its obligation by reason. Therefore, revelation does not initiate the evil and good of anything but unveils the condition of the acts by way of indication, just like reason.*¹³

Revelation, according to Harun Nasution, serves two basic functions. *First*, revelation affirms that there is life after death. Here, the function of revelation serves as information on life in the Hereafter, which

¹² Harun Nasution (2001), *Teologi Islam: Aliran-aliran Sejarah Analisa Perbandingan*, Jakarta: Penerbit Universitas Indonesia, p. 98.

¹³ `Abd al-Jabbār (1962), *op.cit.*, p. 64; Harun Nasution (2001), *op.cit.*, pp. 98-99.



is beyond the realm of human intellect. *Second*, revelation helps the intellect with general guidelines on moral values.¹⁴ Thus, in the second instance, revelation acts as a supplementary, as without revelation it is still possible for a man to conduct himself morally. Revelation serves morality towards perfection. In this view, revelation seems to become necessary when the human *`aql* cannot comprehend the ways and means to have a perfect understanding of human obligations. Revelation does not seem to be the only main sources of guidance, at least in the realm of moral knowledge.

Thus, *al-`aql* is not a mental faculty or capacity, as reason is understood to be, but an in-born system that exists in any human and has a necessary level of moral knowledge and functions independently without the aid of revelation. This position is in contrast with Sunni theological perspectives, the main and dominant school of thought in the Muslim world.

The Mu'tazilah attribution of knowledge to the *`aql* was severely criticized by al-Ghazali (450-505 AH./1058-1111 CE.). Al-Ghazali considers the *`aql* as the instrument, and not a body of knowledge. It is generally thought that through reasoning man can make moral assessments, that is, intellectual reasoning as a guide to knowledge of the object of reasoning by following the path of reasoning and arriving at it.¹⁵ But he further adds that reasoning is divided into sound and unsound, and distinguishing from the sound and the unsound is impossible for all men.¹⁶ These questions are divided into what cannot be known by reasoning of the intellect, and what can be known with conjectural knowledge, and what can be known with sure and certain knowledge.¹⁷ It is clear from the above definition that *`aql* is an intellectual faculty and acts as an instrument to facilitate moral assessments but the reliability of the moral assessments can be obtained only through revelation.

¹⁴ Harun Nasution (2001), *op.cit.*, pp. 99-100; Budhy Munawar Rachman (1995), "Dari Tahapan Moral ke Periode Sejarah: Pemikiran neo-modernisme Islam di Indonesia", *'Ulum al-Qur'an*, no. 3, Vol. vi.

¹⁵ Al-Ghazālī, Abu Hāmid (1994), *al-Ghazālī's Munqidh min al-Dalāl*, Damascus: al-Hikmah, p. 50.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

Osman Bakar, a contemporary Malaysian scholar, discusses al-Ghazali's classification of knowledge into four systems, namely:¹⁸

1. Theoretical and Practical Sciences.
2. Presential (*Huduri*) and Attained (*Husuli*) Knowledge.
3. Religious (*Shar'iyah*) and Intellectual (*'Aqliyah*) Sciences.
4. *Fard 'Ayn* (obligatory on every individual) *Fard Kifayah* (obligatory for all) Sciences.

Al-Ghazali asserts that there are no universal ethical rules (*ahkam*) knowable by independent reason. The ethical theory of knowledge of a general ruling, according to him is based on *sharh*, the Qur'an and Traditions (Sunnah), as sources of *ahkam*.¹⁹ Thus, he denies that the moral knowledge is derivable from independent reason.

Ibn Rushd (520-594 AH./1126-1198 CE.) tried to harmonize the relationship between reason and revelation. In his *Kitab Fasl al-Maqal*, he asserts that demonstrative truth (reason) and scriptural truth cannot conflict. Since the religion is true and summons to the study, this leads to the knowledge of the truth, and that demonstrative study does not lead to conflict with the scriptures. He further adds that if there is an apparent meaning of the scripture with demonstrative conclusions, it must be interpreted allegorically (i.e., metaphorically).²⁰ The Law (*sharh*), according to Ibn Rushd, commands the reflection of beings, and the

¹⁸ Osman Bakar (1992), *Classification of Knowledge in Islam: A Study in Islamic Philosophy of Science*, Kuala Lumpur: Institute Kajian Dasar, p. 203. *Theoretical science* refers to a science of rules of a subject of study is based on which is suggested to explain a fact, or an event. *Practical sciences* refers to a science, which has been accepted and suitable for situation in which something is used while *Presential knowledge* is direct, immediate, supra-rational, intuitive and contemplative while *Attained knowledge* is indirect, rational, logical and discursive. *Religious Sciences* refer to those, which are acquired from the prophets and are not arrived by reason while *Intellectual sciences* are either acquired by reason or experimentation like arithmetic and medicine. *Fard 'ayn* refers to a religious obligation that is binding on every Muslim while *Fard kifayah* refers to what is divinely ordained and binding for the Muslim community as a whole but is not necessarily binding for each member of the community, see Osman Bakar (1992), *op.cit.*, pp. 204-207.

¹⁹ Al-Ghazali (1994), *op.cit.*, p. 47.

²⁰ Ibn Rushd, Abū al-Walīd (n.d.), *Kitāb Fasl al-Maqāl*, Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, p. 32 and Hourani, George F. (trans.) (1976), *Kitāb Fasl al-Maqāl*, London: Luzac & Co., p. 50.

pursuit of knowledge about them by intellect, and then the Law commands the study of philosophy as obligatory.²¹ In this manner, there could not be any possibilities of contradiction between religion and philosophy.

Ibn Taymiyyah (660-727 AH./1262-1327 CE.) denies any possibilities of superiority of *`aql* with revelation. In his famous writing entitled *Dar' Ta'arud al-`aql wa al-Naql*, Ibn Taymiyyah affirms the overwhelming superiority of revelation and the absolute belief in revelation, that is, both of the Qur'an and Sunnah, are necessity. He argues that the *`aql* depends upon revelational knowledge regardless of whether it conforms or contradicts revelational knowledge. His line of contention is that the Prophet Muhammad will not report or teach that which is untrue. Similarly, Allah will not reveal the Qur'an except the truth.²² Thus, in the realm of moral knowledge, the *`aql* should not only be guided, but should also not contradict with what was revealed from Allah.

Yusuf al-Qaradawi (b. 1344 AH./1926 CE.), a prominent contemporary Muslim scholar and jurist says that the highest authority of knowledge in Islam is the Qur'an and Sunnah. Other sources of knowledge such as *ijma`* and *qiyas* are basically rational proofs, supplementary to the Qur'an and Sunnah. They are not independent sources but aim to ensure conformity with the Qur'an and Sunnah and have no authority unless validated from the evidences of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Thus, all matters pertaining to *`aqidah*, *akhlaq* and thought (reason) need guidance's from the Qur'an and Sunnah.²³

Unlike the position held by Mu'tazilah, it was generally accepted that revelation is unique reliable and unique objective as a source of knowledge, including the realm of ethical values. Revelation alone assesses acts from a divine perspective and thus it is the sole reason for the existence of morality in Islam. Nothing in the act alone or *`aql* guides man to the knowledge of

²¹ Ibn Rushd, Abū al-Walīd (1909), *al-Kashf `an Manāhij al-Adilla fi `Aqā'id al-Milla*, Hourani, George F. (eds.), London: Brill, p. 6 and Najjar, Ibrahim (trans.) (2001), *al-Kashf `an Manāhij al-Adilla fi `Aqā'id al-Milla*, Oxford: Oneworld Publications, p. 2-3.

²² Ibn Taymiyyah, Taqī al-Din Ahmad (1985), *Dar' Ta'arud al-`Aql wa al-Naql*, Vol. 1, Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-`Ilmiyyah, p. 296.

²³ Al-Qaradawi, Yusuf (n.d.), *al-Marji'iyah al-`Ulya fi al-Islam li al-Qur'an wa al-Sunnah*, Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, p. 13.

the value of the acts. The question of independent *`aql* does not arise due to its unreliability and often contradicts the *sharh*. The most damaging aspect of *`aql* is that it is shaped by its environment and the circumstances prevailing in it, all of which influence the assessments of the goal.

QADA' AND QADAR

The principle of *qada'* and *qadar* is the most disturbing issue to Harun Nasution. He believes that because the dogmatic doctrines formulated by the scholars of the past, particularly, those from the Ash`ariyyah and the Jabariyyah, the Muslims have become weak and unproductive. By upholding firmly to the principle of *qada'* and *qadar*, there is no progress in human thought as God predetermines the fates and actions of humans. The doctrine as advocated by them, according to Harun Nasution, instills the idea of fatalism that man no longer feels free to change their state of affairs as this has been decided upon by God.²⁴ The attitude of fatalism, as Harun Nasution insisted creates an emotional tendency of resignation to God, surrendering oneself to His will. This attitude, as he further adds, gives no room for human freedom and because of the absence of the will, man loses his creativity and intellectual ability. Thus, fatalistic tendencies and low productivity, as Harun Nasution envisages are the results of dogmatic rigidity of assigning little or no regard for the role of the human intellect, which is closely linked to the human free will.

Harun Nasution promotes the Mu`tazilah doctrine of human free will, which is intimately associated with their principle of Divine Justice. Montgomery Watt in his writing entitled *Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam* narrates two important arguments of the Mu`tazilah doctrine of free will. *First*, it liberates man from the allegiance of fatalistic tendency. *Second*, the doctrine is according to the principle of *`adl*, the justice or righteousness of God.²⁵ The second argument similarly ascribed to the Mu`tazilah is phrased by al-Shahrastani of Wasil b. `Ata' (d. 748 CE. - founder of Mu`tazilah) who narrated the following:

God is wise and just: evil and injustice cannot be attributed to Him. God cannot will His creatures the

²⁴ Harun Nasution (1995), "Teologi Islam dan Upaya Peningkatan Productivitas," *Islam Rasional: Gagasan dan Pemikiran*, Bandung: Penerbit Mizan, p. 113.

²⁵ Watt, Montgomery W. (1948), *Free will and Predestination in Early Islam*, London: Luzac & Company Ltd., p. 68.

*contrary of what He commands them; He cannot determine what they do and then punish them for doing. Hence, man is an author of good and evil, belief and unbelief, obedience and disobedience; and it is he who will be required in accordance with his deeds. Over all these things, therefore, God has given him power.*²⁶

The whole focus of Mu'tazilah idea of Divine Justice is primarily to uphold the doctrine of human free will. The lack of free will and no regard for the role of the intellect, according to Harun Nasution, undermines the principle of Divine Justice. God cannot be said of being just if He had predestined the fate of a man without giving him the privilege to decide his own destiny. The term Divine Justice, as Harun Nasution explains, must be referred to the opportunity accorded by God to man to conduct himself freely as he wishes. Thus, Divine Justice in its true sense of the principle is that man is allowed to exercise both his intellect and will and that God will reward or punish him accordingly as per his actual deeds.²⁷

In the discussion of human productivity, Harun Nasution contends that the religion has two principal teachings as follow:²⁸ *First*, the religion teaches that the life in this world is material in nature while the next world is concerned with spiritual life. This teaching, thus, has an implication on human productivity. If worldly life is regarded as important, then human productivity will increase, while if spiritual life in the next world is sought, inevitable, productivity deteriorates. *Second*, the religion possesses teachings regarding the fate and acts of human. If the fate of man is predetermined by God, in accordance with acts of man being created by Him, then the productivity of the society, who holds to the belief, is indeed low. While the society who believes that man decides his own fate and that he creates his own act, productivity shall be high. This first principal is known as *Jabariyyah* or fatalism while the second principal is known as *Qadariyyah* or human freedom in will and action.

Harun Nasution argues if the scholars and society in classical period hold firmly to the fatalistic view of the *Jabariyyah* (without

²⁶ Al-Shahrastānī (1967), *op.cit.*, p. 40.

²⁷ Harun Nasution (1995), "Pandangan Islam tentang keadilan," in *Islam Rasional: Gagasan dan Pemikiran*, Bandung: Penerbit Mizan, pp. 66-67.

²⁸ Harun Nasution (1995), "Teologi Islam dan Upaya Peningkatan Produktivitas," *op.cit.*, p. 111.

worldly orientation) instead of view of *Qadariyyah* with its concept of human free will, then accelerated progress will not be achieved. Thus, Harun Nasution implies that the belief in *qada* and *qadar* leads to fatalism and suggests that the belief in the doctrine of *Sunnah Allah* instead.²⁹

Harun Nasution was wrong to suggest that *qada* and *qadar* negates a Muslim perception about the world and its surroundings. This has been the impression given by the Western scholars of the attitude of several Muslim individuals and communities of the resignation to their fate and the little or no effort to improve of their living conditions.³⁰ In reality, the root of fatalism lay in the ignorance of the teachings of the Qur'an of which the first instruction received by Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.), is the word, "Read!"³¹ Thus, the actual understanding of the concept of *qada* and *qadar*, which is of one the tenets of article of faith in Islam, is of paramount importance.

The linguistic meaning of *al-qada* refers to the "perfect commanding, decreeing, ruling, accomplishing and perfect precision in execution," while *al-qadar* refers to the "setting, commanding, executing, and encompassing in due and precise proportions."³² *Al-qada* (divine decree) is the creation of things and actions and the assignation of everything to its proper place,³³ as Allah says in the Qur'an: "Then He completed and finished from their creation as seven heavens in two Days and He made each heaven its affairs."³⁴ While *al-qadar* is Allah's predetermination of His creations of a term, so that when the appointed term arrives, it will

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 112. Harun Nasution outlines six characteristics of *Sunnat Allah*:

1. The esteem position occupied by reason.
2. Human free will and action.
3. Freedom of thought from the limited (selected) evidences of the Qur'an and Hadith.
4. Belief in *sunnat Allah* and its causation
5. Exercising metaphorical method of interpretation to the revealed text
6. Dynamism in attitude and thinking (see *Ibid.*, p. 112)

³⁰ Khalifā, Mohammad (1983), *The Sublime Qur'an and orientalism*, London: Longman Group Limited, p. 193.

³¹ *Surah al-'Alaq* 96:1.

³² As-Salek, Salek (1995), *Fate in Islam: The Salaf's Guide to the Understanding of al-Qada' wa al-Qadar*, Medinah: Dar Bukhari, p. 9.

³³ Al-Māturīdī, Abū Mansūr (1982), *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, Kholeif, Fathalla (ed.), Bayrut: Dar El-Maqreq Edituer Sarl, p. 308.

³⁴ *Surah Fussilat* 41:12.

neither be delayed by a moment nor can it be advanced³⁵ as Allah says: “*It is not for the soul to die save by the will of Allah, a term written down.*”³⁶

Al-Ash`ari the founder of the school, which was named after him, took an almost diametrically-opposing stand on all major issues advocated by the Mu`tazilah.³⁷ Al-Ash`ari, in his *al-Ibanah `an Usul al-Diyanah*, uses the *al-qadar* in an active sense to affirm God’s power of determination and that, both good and bad, are attributed to God.³⁸ While in *Kitab al-Luma`*, he defines *al-qada`* as the decree of God which is a creation and includes what is right, such as acts of obedience and what God has not prohibited, and it also includes what is wrong, such as unbelief and acts of disobedience.³⁹

Al-Ghazali discusses *al-qada`* and *al-qadar* in the same manner, namely, that God, who created man, his powers and his movements, also created all his actions and that all his actions are dependent upon God’s power. He advances two arguments for this view. *First*, since the power of God is perfect and unlimited, it cannot but the actions of man be created by God.⁴⁰ *Second*, since all man’s actions are dependent upon the power of God, there is no reason to differentiate some movements of man from all man’s actions, as their very essence is all equally dependent upon God.⁴¹ It is obvious the basis of al-Ghazali’s second argument is aimed to quash the view that differentiates certain actions by man over which God has power and certain actions of man over which God has no power.

³⁵ Al-Tahāwī, Abū Ja`far Ahmad (1997), *‘Aqidah al-Tahāwīyyah*, Bayrut: Mu`assasah al-Risalah, p. 321; al-‘Izzi, ‘Abd al-Mun`im Salih al-‘Alī (trans.) (1999), *‘Aqidah al-Tahāwīyyah*, Dammam: WAMY, p. 38.

³⁶ *Surah Ali ‘Imrān* 3:145.

³⁷ Fakhry, Majid (1991), *Ethical theories in Islam*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, p. 48.

³⁸ Al-Ash`arī (1989), *al-Ibānah `an Usūl al-Diyānah*, Madinah: al-Jami`ah al-Islamiyyah, p. 199; Klein, Walter C. (trans.) (1940), *al-Ibānah `an Usūl al-Diyānah*, New Haven: American Oriental Society, p. 113.

³⁹ Al-Ash`arī (2000), *Kitāb al-Luma`*, Bayrut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, p. 50; McCarthy, Richard J. (trans.) (1953), *Kitāb al-Luma`*, Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, p. 65.

⁴⁰ Al-Ghazālī, Abū Hāmid Muhammad (1983), *al-Iqtisād fi al-‘Itiqād*, Bayrut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, p. 87.

⁴¹ Al-Ghazālī, Abū Hamid Muhammad (2002), *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, Vol. 4, Bayrut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, p. 215; Karim, Fazlul (trans.) (1982), *Ihya’ ‘Ulumuddin*, Vol. 4, New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, p. 250.

Al-qadar, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, means making an appraisal. He explains that in the terminology of the *Shari'ah*, it means that Allah has the knowledge of the quantity and temporality of everything from the beginning of creation.⁴² He created them by His Power and Will and according to His Knowledge and decreed them (*al-qada'*) in the Safe Table (*al-Lawh al-Mahfuz* – the Book of Decrees) before creating them.⁴³ He supports his explanation by advancing the verse: “No calamity befalls on the earth or in you but is inscribed in the Book of Decrees.”⁴⁴ Thus, nothing would possibly happen outside the Knowledge, Will and Power of God, that is, Allah’s Will, Power and Knowledge encompass all creations.

Faith in *al-qada'* and *al-qadar* does not mean that man is denied freedom of choice. In many verses, the Qur’an confirms freedom of choice to man and, consequently, the responsibility he has to bear for his deeds.⁴⁵ One of such verses is: “Has there not been over a man period of time, when he was not a thing worth mentioning? Verily, We have created man from nutfah (mixed drops of male and female discharges), in order to try him, so We made him hearer and seer. Verily, We showed him the way, whether he be grateful or ungrateful (rest on his will).”⁴⁶ Thus, the concept of free will is clearly conspicuous in the Qur’an. The Sunni scholars generally advocated the doctrine of freedom with responsibility, but they differed in opinion on the illustration of the said doctrine.

In his *al-Ibanah*, al-Ash`ari introduces the term *iktisab* (acquisition) to illustrate the concept of free will. He says that there cannot be on the part of human beings that God does not will, by which he means that God creates every acquisition of man. Later, in answer to a question, he explains that by acquisition he means acquired acts or movements to carry out an action of positive or negative moral value,⁴⁷ in other words, an action for

⁴² Ibn Taymiyyah, Taqī al-Dīn Ahmad (2003), *Sharh al-`Aqīdah al-Wasitiyah*, Jeddah: Dar Ibn al-Jawziyyah, p. 418; Khan, Muhammad Rafiq (trans.) (1996), *Sharh al-`Aqīdah al-Wasitiyah*, Riyadh: Darulsallam Publications, p. 31.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 424.

⁴⁴ *Surah al-Hadīd* 57:22.

⁴⁵ Al-`Anānī, Hassan (1990), *al-Mas`uliyah wa al-Tanmiyah al-Dhātīyah fī al-Islam* (Freedom and Responsibility in *Qur`anic*), Kayani, M. S. (trans.), Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, p. 77.

⁴⁶ *Surah al-Insān* 76:1-3.

⁴⁷ Al-Ash`arī (1989), *op.cit.*, p. 170.

which man is accounted for. Thus, here is the notion of responsibility for the human will for the choice of action. Similarly, in *Kitab al-Luma`*, he uses the term 'acquisition' explicitly to describe the sense of human moral action.⁴⁸

Al-Ghazali in his monumental work, *Ihya' `Ulum al-Din*, describes the aspect of human action that lies between his relationship with God, and with reference to this relationship, that movement is called acquisition (*iktisab*). He goes on to say that such movements cannot be a compelled act nor can it be a free act. He argues that it cannot be a compelled act when man is necessarily conscious of a distinction between movements, which is the object of power. Nor, can it be exclusively a free act of man in the absence of foreknowledge and control. Thus, he concludes that as both extremes are unacceptable, the possible solution is the middle course, which is the acquisition. Acquisition is the medium of the flow of God's power to the power of man. In short, acquisition is a description of any act resulting from man's choice under the pretext that man's power to choose to act and man's power to act and the act resulting from man's exercise of these two powers are created by God.⁴⁹ Thus, the term 'acquisition' here refers to the way by which man's acts are said to be objects of his power and this is created in man by God. Consequently, by the choice and act he has, man he is responsible personally for both.

Unlike the above scholars, Ibn Taymiyyah rules out the term 'acquisition' but describes the aspect of human freedom within the Will, Power and Knowledge of God. He says Allah creates all things by His Will, which happens according to His Awareness based on His Eternal Knowledge. Likewise, everything happens according to what He has recorded in the Book of Decrees. Power and intention are proved for man from whom his acts emanate. On this basis, he deserves the recompense of either praise and reward or condemnation and punishment. The relationship of the deeds towards man is not contrary to the relation of these deeds towards Allah for his inventive and creative relationship, for He alone is the Creator of all these causes, which bring these actions into being.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Al-Ash`arī (2000), *op.cit.*, p. 44.

⁴⁹ Al-Ghazālī (2002), *op.cit.*, Vol. 4, p. 227.

⁵⁰ Ibn Taymiyyah (2003), *op.cit.*, p. 422.

Contrary to the argument by Harun Nasution that *al-qada'* and *al-qadar* implies fatalism, the Sunni's position in this regard relates to freedom with responsibility. A man may do good or bad deeds with his ability and will, and he deserves either reward for the good deeds, or punishment for the evil ones. But Allah creates the deeds in man. The rationale behind this is the fact that Allah brings to existence the deeds as well as all the means that manifest these deeds. This is true as affirmed by the verses: "*But you cannot will, unless Allah will,*"⁵¹ and "*And if Allah touches you with harm, none can remove it but He, and if touches you with good, then He is able to do all things.*"⁵²

TAQLID AND IJTIHAD

Harun Nasution in his article entitled *Islam, Penghambat Bagi Usaha-usaha Modernisasi?* poses the question as to whether the traditional religious teachings are the main obstacle or the very least delay the process of modernization. He offers two arguments. *First*, traditional Islam, like other religions, is considered too dogmatic. *Second*, the teachings of Islam focus on the Hereafter but at the same time pay attention to the social and economical needs of the Muslim society. This is because, according to him, Islam is rooted in traditionalism with narrow-minded teachings. He considers the narrow-minded teachings and traditional Islam incompatible with modernization and equally opposes the process of modernization.⁵³

The idea of traditional Islam to Harun Nasution is the practice of the Muslim *Ummah* to follow and accept the authorities of past scholars. In the case of Indonesia, the Muslims follow the *Shafi'i Madhhab* in juristic matters and Ash'ariyyah School in theological issues. The Muslim society in Indonesia, according to Harun Nasution, only knows Islam from the interpretations of Shafi'ite in *fiqh* and Ash'ariyyah in *tawhid* (theology).⁵⁴ Harun Nasution characterizes such strict compliance as *taqlid* because of the absence of positive assessment in relation to modern issues. He promotes *'aql* or *ijtihad* and considers it the third source of Islamic teachings after the Qur'an and Sunnah.⁵⁵ The mere

⁵¹ *Surah al-Insān* 76:30.

⁵² *Surah al-An'am* 6:17.

⁵³ Harun Nasution (1995), "Islam, Penghambat Bagi Usaha-usaha Modernisasi?" in *Islam Rasional: Gagasan dan Pemikiran*, Bandung: Penerbit Mizan, p. 157.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

⁵⁵ Harun Nasution (1995), "Masalah Akal dan Akhlak," in *Islam Rasional: Gagasan*

following and submission to these authorities to him implies unreasonable and thoughtless acceptance of the narrow view of juristic and creedal interpretations of Islamic principles.

The term *taqlid* is from the verb *qallada*, which means, “to imitate, follow, obey so on,” giving the meaning of accepting or submission to the authority. In its technical sense, *taqlid* means acting upon the word of another without *hujjah* (proof or lawful authority). It has an important role throughout the Islamic religious sciences where it does not have a completely negative meaning. *Taqlid* implies unreasonable and thoughtless acceptance of authority.⁵⁶ Analytical thought (*ijtihad*) in jurisprudence came to an end in the eleventh century, while blind imitation (*taqlid*) began to flourish.⁵⁷ The four schools of *fiqh*, namely Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi`i and Hanbali were completely formed and the minutest of details worked out in jurisprudence attributed to *taqlid*.⁵⁸

Al-Ghazali who came after the formation of the four legal schools defines *taqlid* as the loyalty to an inherited, naïve and second-hand beliefs by merely accepting them as truth. He refers to the people who believe in the theologians and philosophers who formulated confusing doctrines, which almost corrupt the true creeds of the religion.⁵⁹ However, al-Ghazali defended the *ijtihad* of theologians (Ash`ariyyah) whose systematic arguments successfully preserve orthodoxy, defended the creed from prophetic source and rectified heretical innovations.⁶⁰ Similarly, he acknowledges the *ijtihad* of the founders of the four legal schools on matters of Islamic jurisprudence, for they expounded the rulings based on the evidence of the Qur`an and Sunnah.⁶¹

dan Pemikiran, Bandung: Penerbit Mizan, p. 56 and “Hukum Islam dan dinamika masyarakat,” in *Islam Rasional: Gagasan dan Pemikiran*, Bandung: Penerbit Mizan, p. 198.

⁵⁶ Nyazee, Imrān Ahsan Khan (2003), *Islamic jurisprudence*, Kuala Lumpur: The Other Press, pp. 329-330.

⁵⁷ Al-Alwani, Taha Jabir (1997), *The Ethics of Disagreement in Islam*, Herndon: IIIT, p. 109.

⁵⁸ Philips, Bilal (2002), *The Evolution of Fiqh*, Kuala Lumpur: AS Noordeen, p. 109.

⁵⁹ Al-Ghazālī (1994), *op.cit.*, p. 28.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*.

⁶¹ Al-Ghazālī (2002), *op.cit.*, Vol. 4, p. 31.

Ibn Taymiyyah categories *taqlid* in his *Majmu` Fatawa* into two types: *first*, the mere following of authorities whose rulings are based on evidence from the Qur'an and Sunnah. *Second*, the blind

imitation of authorities based on heresy and without evidence from revelation. The second type of *taqlid* is not permitted, while the first type of *taqlid* is. The rationale is based on the fact that the founders of the four legal schools had derived their sources of law from the *Shari`ah*. Nevertheless, he contends that *ijtihad* outside the juristic view of the four legal schools is permitted based on legitimate evidence from the Qur'an and Sunnah. However, he asserts that not everyone can be a *mujtahid*.⁶²

From the Sunni perspective the differences in the *fiqh* of the four schools center on the *furu`* (subsidiaries or sub-divisions of *halal* and *haram* issues) rather than the *usul* (the fundamental principles) of belief.⁶³ Thus, throughout the history of Islamic jurisprudence, generally, the majority of the scholars view that following any of the four schools is acceptable. They also view that *ijtihad* is permitted by the Sunnah but according to the conditions (*shurut*)⁶⁴ and procedure of

⁶² Ibn Taymiyyah, Taqī al-Dīn (1998), *Majmu` Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyyah*, Vol. 8, Riyad: Dār al-Wafā', pp. 555-556. A *mujtahid* must first look at the *nusūs* of the Qur'an and Hadīth and should there be no *nass* on the subject-matter, then he may resort to the manifest text (*zāhir*) of the Qur'an and Hadīth and interpret while applying the rules pertaining to the general (*`āmm*) and specific (*khāss*), the absolute and the qualified and so forth. Should there be no manifest text on the subject in the Qur'an and verbal Sunnah, the *mujtahid* may resort to actual (*fi`lī*) and tacit approved (*taqrīrī*) Sunnah. Failing this, he must find out if there is a ruling of *ijmā`* or *qiyās* available. This will entail a recourse to the Qur'an, the Hadīth or *ijmā`* for a precedent that has an *`illah* identical to that of the *far`* (the case that a solution), see Kamali, Mohammad Hashim (1998), *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, Petaling Jaya: Ilmiah Publishers Sdn. Bhd. p. 379. This procedure of *ijtihād* was formulated by al-Shāfi`ī (1979) in his *al-Risālah fī Usūl al-Fiqh*, Cairo: Dar al-Turath, pp. 261-262.

⁶³ al-Shahrastani (1990), *op.cit.*, pp. 11-22 and I. Doi, Abdur Rahman (1990), *Shari`ah: The Islamic Law*, Kuala Lumpur: AS Noordeen, p. 85.

- ⁶⁴ a) Knowledge of Arabic to the extent that enables the scholar to enjoy a correct understanding of the Qur'an and Sunnah.
- b) The *mujtahid* must also be knowledgeable in the Qur'an and Sunnah, in particular, he must have a full grasp of the legal texts (*āyāt al-ahkām*).
- c) The *mujtahid* must possess an adequate knowledge of Sunnah (*ahādīth al-ahkām*) and able to distinguish the reliable from the weak and the authentic and spurious.

ijtihad.⁶⁵ Muhammad Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti (b. 1347 AH./1929 CE.), a prominent contemporary scholar says that following the *fiqh* of any of the four Sunni school is a must for Muslims who cannot or are unable to deduce rulings from the Qur'an and Sunnah. Therefore, he argues a person who do not have the knowledge to deduce rulings from the Qur'an and Sunnah but refused to follow any of the school had deviated from the core teachings of *Shari'ah*.⁶⁶ Thus, the position of Harun Nasution on strict compliance to any of the schools within the Sunni perspective as *taqlid* is unreasonable and does not follow the learned views of Muslim scholars, as the works of the *madhahib* are treated in conjunction with the authority (the Qur'an and the Sunnah) in which they are founded.

CONCLUSION

The hallmark of Harun Nasution is his voice of rationalism in Islam. A noted and prominent contemporary Indonesian scholar, he owes it to the Western education at McGill University for the rationalistic approach to Islamic studies. The six-year duration at the McGill University had shaped his thought to view Islam as a religion that can be analysed critically. At McGill University, Harun Nasution picked up the skills of semantic analysis and allegorical interpretation of Qur'anic vocabulary and verses, combining creatively both methodologies which are conspicuous in his later writings. Thus, Islam is not a religion with narrow and legalistic doctrines but in its real essence has a broad and wide horizon and that it allows space for interpretation in a more contextual and liberal manner.

It seems that Harun Nasution understands of *ijtihad* or reason is not a learned one as he had categorized it as an important source, after

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- d) The *mujtahid* must also know the substance of the *furu'* works and the points on which there is an *ijmā'*.
 - e) The *mujtahid* must have adequate knowledge of the rule and procedures of *qiyās*.
 - f) The *mujtahid* should also know the objectives (*maqāsīd*) of the of the *Shari'ah*, which consist of the *masālih* (consideration of the public interest), and
 - g) The *mujtahid* must be an upright (`adil) person who refrains from committing sins and whose judgment the people can trust, see `Abd al-Mun'im `an Nimr (n.d.), *al-Ijtihad*, Cairo: al-Hayah al-Misriyyah al-`Ammah li al-Kitab, 181-183 and Kamali (1998), *op.cit.*, pp. 374-376.

⁶⁵ `Abd al-Mun'im `an Nimr (n.d.), *op.cit.*; Kamalī (1998), *op.cit.*, pp. 374-380.

⁶⁶ Al-Buti, Muhammad Sa'id Ramadan (n.d.), *al-Lamadhbiyyah Akhtar Bida`ahatin Tuhaddidu al-Shari'ah al-Islamiyyah*, Damascus: Maktabah al-Farabi, p. 69.

the Qur'an and Sunnah. He used it more as an intellectual weapon for promoting his idea of rationalism. His understanding of the term is more towards *ijtihad mutlaq* (absolute) which is not restricted to any *madhhab*

or *ijtihad* within a specific *madhhab*. The latter usage is more likely the eclectic attitude of *talfiq* rather than *ijtihad*. In theological perspectives, Harun Nasution has inevitably diminished the role of religious traditions in Indonesia. His insistence on the spirit of inquiry and critical examination had opened the door of ideology of suspicion towards anything coming from that authority. Some critiques of him find that his knowledge of both theology and jurisprudence is far from sufficient. Thus, he managed to rock the boat by mere slogan without giving substantive and learned position on issues in theology and jurisprudence. By quoting a few examples without providing concrete and relevant evidence from the main sources of Islam had exposed the vulnerability of his rationalism. Particularly, his suggestion to uphold the belief in *sunnah Allah* instead of belief in *qada'* and *qadar* was a grave mistake indeed as the latter is an essential and one of the six elements of the Articles of Faith.

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